VII

The Ma'n "Gypsies" of the West Aden Protectorate

Every night during my stay at Mūdiyah, the principal village of Dathīnah, the scene some fifty years ago of the love affair of Sham'ah that stirred up a tribal feud still well remembered [1], I heard the singing and drums of the Ma'n gypsies. That is until Ramaḍān, for then, through the representations of the Qāḍī and certain prominent men of the village, they were restrained from giving their performance. About half a dozen of the high square black goat-hair tents of the Ma'n, known as *karbah* (pl. *karābī*) [2], were pitched round the tribal guard fort in which I had taken up brief residence. The Ma'n seemed to be very prosperous, for they possessed excellent camels and other beasts.

The Ma'n are variously said to have appeared first from the north-west (*al-qiblah*), from Khawlān of the Yemen, and perhaps from other places. When mischievous people wish to tease the proud and warlike 'Awlaqī tribes of the Ma'nī Shaikhdom they make play with the possibility of a common ancestry of the gypsies and tribesmen – which of course, is an *'aib*, an insult. In the Yemen, to say, *"Wallāh innak dawshān*, By God, you are a minstrel", would be insulting indeed. On questioning the well-known MUBĀRAK 'ABDULLĀH AL-ṬAWṢALĪ [3] some years later, he said that the gypsy tribe was probably called Ma'n simply because they accompanied the Ma'n group of Upper 'Awlaqī tribes down to Dathīnah, but that they had no proper tribal name known to him (his knowledge of tribal matters is encyclopaedic), and are called *shaḥath*

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[1] C. DE LANDBERG, Dialectes de l'Arabie Méridionale, Daṯinah. Leiden 1909-1913. I, p. 5 s. and p. 179 s. I read out passages from this volume to friends at Mūdiyah who were amazed to find the story in print, pointing out to me from time to time the descendants of the principal actors. Al-Qufl, the *ḥuṣn* which figures in the story, still stands to the east of Mūdiyah village.

[2] There is a Ḥadīth that the Ka'bah was a tent, and I have wondered if these tents of cube-like shape were not indeed the prototype of the Ka'bahs of Mecca and Najrān. The black cloth covering of the Meccan Ka'bah would bring it very near to these tents. The Ka'bah is the Bait, which is after all the Arabic for tent, as opposed to *dār*. Karbah and Ka'bah differ only in one radical. "Gloss. Daṯ." suggests the word is Persian in origin. C. DE LANDBERG, Glossaire Daṯinois (Leiden 1920-1942).

[3] His picture, with a sensational, not entirely correct caption, appears in WENDELL PHILLIPS, Qataban and Sheba (London 1955), p. 33.

or *shaḥadh*, that is to say, beggar minstrels [4]. The ʿAwlaqīs do indeed claim certain rights or dues in Dathīnah as a result of this incursion, to this day [5].

Some Maʿn are settled in the ʿAwdhalī village of am-Nigdah famous for its shrine, living in houses there. They are said to have nothing of the lewd gypsy ways of the other branches of the tribe – the Ahl al-Muzaiyad whose tents were pitched at Mūdiyah, and the Ahl al-Nawwāḥ with whom they were at variance, the latter being then encamped at one of the many villages clustering round Mūdiyah. Village scandal had it that the local officer of the tribal guards who has turned dissident since that time but was recently received back, had formed an attachment to one of the Muzaiyad girls, and so favoured the Ahl al-Muzaiyad by permitting them to stay close by Mūdiyah where most money could be made. To the other branch, the Ahl al-Nawwāḥ of whom I saw little, belonged a lovely girl, they told me, called Bū Sāʿah because she usually wears a wrist watch. When, later on, I had moved over to Zārah, the seat of the ʿAwdhalī Sultans, an old beggar Maʿnī woman found her way into the house, by name Qamrah, at one time a dancer, belonging to the Āl al-Muzaiyad of am-Nigdah. Though her youth was long past, the bold look in her eye told the story of the days when she was young and beautiful like the Maʿnī girls of Mūdiyah, and her speech had the ingratiating wheedling way of beggars – a rain of blessings for fifty cents – *Allāh ḥaffaẓ-ak min al-qawm wa-'l-lawm, wa-'l-ʿāfiyah faidat (khairah) māl, Allāh yiʿallī daragat-kum, manʿūm bi-'l-ʿāfiyah, Allāh yiḥyīk* [6].

On the occasion of the arrival of an Aden Protectorate Levies convoy the assistant political officer granted special permission for the Maʿn to hold a *samrah*, an evening's dancing. The headlights of the trucks were turned onto the crowd of village people and soldiers, my pressure lamp and all the lanterns from the fort were brought out, a circle was formed with the Maʿnī drummers sitting on the ground at one end of it, and the Maʿnī girls danced, or rather ran up and down in a sort of gliding trot, the weight of *riyāls* and silver ornaments with which they were covered jingling and tinkling all the time. Their heady perfumes and the thick dust lying heavy in the warm air, raised by the dancing and crowding of the villagers breathed a sharp catching

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[4] Gloss. Dat., pp. 2023, 2704 s., *shāḥidh*, pl. *shuḥḥādh*. Datînah, pp. 165, 747 with illustration of drum, 1789.

[5] Aḥmad Faḍl al-ʿAbdalī, Hadīyat al-Zaman (Cairo 1351 H.), p. 142 records a raid of the ʿAwlaqī Sultan ʿAbdullāh b. Farīd on Lahej in 1234 H. (1818-1819 A. D.), and the "Account of the Arab Tribes in the Vicinity of Aden" (Bombay 1909), p. 56 notes that the ʿAwlaqī threatened to build a fort at Qarn Murshid in 1882 which indicates that he must have had some effective sovereignty in Dathīnah at that time.

[6] *Qawm* "tribes", perhaps "tribal attack"; *lawm* "disgrace" but it has also a technical sense; *faidah*, probably *fāʿidah*. Probably the phrase means, "Health is the best of goods. May God give you honour". *Manʿūm*, etc., is a common Dathīnah reply to the greeting *Kīf ḥālak*. This may be compared with a blessing I heard of a beggar of the Āl al-Shaikh Bū Bakr at Saiwūn, a Saiyid, *Allāh yaḥfaẓ-kum wa-yuṭawwil aʿmār-kum, al-ḥabāʾib yadʿūn lakum min Āl al-Shaikh Bū Bakr, wa-saʿad al-ḥabāʾib wa-yutammim kull maqṣūd-ak*, "God guard you and prolong your life, the Saiyids of the Āl al-Shaikh Bū Bakr pray for [or bless] you, the Saiyids give aid and he will realise all your aims."

excitement into the evening. No village women were there of course, although in Dathīnah like all tribal peasant communities, purdah in the strict sense hardly exists outside a few families of social distinction or wealth, but propriety dictates a woman's conduct; moreover it was murmured that the village women resented the presence of the Ma'n.

While as yet no one has ventured to dance, or at intervals between the dancing, two girls together at a time run or glide round the inside edge of the circle formed by the crowd. Sometimes the one holds the other's hand arched up in the air; this signifies the invitation – enter into the circle any one of you who desires us. Sooner or later some gallant will edge his way through the crowd into the circle and dance with them. The commonest dance naturally is a mime of courtship. The girl will run round the circle with her hand held to her ear, which means – you mustn't kiss me! She holds her skirt in her other hand. The man in turn will stretch forth his hands before him as to say – I am afire with thirst for you, let me but sip. This is ancient convention in Arabia; it is to be found too in such as the sophisticated but ardent Ḥaḍramī poet of the 19th century YAḤYĀ 'UMAR who spent so many years in India, and in a mélange of Arabic and Hindustani, astonishingly like mediaeval Spanish verse with its Arabic *kharjah* he sings [7],

> You lovely thing,
> Your lover slake, donne un peu d'eau [8].
> Of pity's sake – tenderness show.
> See how wasted, how thin I grow.

Sometimes the dancer will grasp his belly in his hands, as if to say – for love of you I am a prisoner (*maqbūḍ*). He may touch his membrum virile even. The tribesman will strike his right hand on the hilt of his dagger to convey the boast – I am a tribesman, a *qabīlī*, a fine strong young fellow [9]. Another in earnest of his manliness made exaggerated strutting movements with his feet, while others jumped up and down [10]. At Khanfar I have already noted the dagger play at this type of dance. Sometimes the man creeps round on his toes with bent knees, but I did not discover the significance of this movement. A man would sometimes give a little quivering of his shoulder or some other part of his body, but I noticed that none of the Ma'nī women did this. In Southern Arabia this quivering is known as *lawq*, and is described by Europeans as belly-wriggling or belly-dancing, but it is certainly not confined to this part of the body alone. In the dance there is much of chasing and pursuit, frequent touchings and passionate gesture. Sometimes the girl will bring her elbow round to avoid a kiss – for the man makes a play of snatching a kiss from her, or perhaps indeed he seriously attempts it. In Ḥaḍramawt, for a man to kiss his wife in the presence of another, even a slave so menial

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[7] Prose and Poetry from Ḥaḍramawt. London 1951, Ar. text, p. 91.

[8] These words are in Hindustani in the original.

[9] Cf. the picture in G. WYMAN BURY, Land of Uz (London 1911), p. 278 with a tribesman holding a dagger.

[10] Cf. Prose and Poetry, Pref. p. 22.

that a noble woman does not bother to veil before him, would be considered an act of indecency; I imagine the Dathīnah people too would find such conduct repugnant, but as the dancer makes his essay at a kiss, the *muṭabbin* or drummer shouts out, *"Raʿhā wāḍī!"* [11] This I first thought to render as, "See, she is ritually pure!" for I understood it to be conventional fiction that the Maʿnī girls are innocent or chaste, but I have since wondered if I was not mistaken, for *awḍā'* in the Ḥadīth can mean "prettier". So the drummer may have meant, "See how pretty she is!" MUBĀRAK ʿABDULLĀH however writes that *Raʿ-hā wāḍiyah"* is a joking expression. While dancing the girls exclaim, *"Sarā"*, which was explained to me as *"Nisrī"*, "we 're going to have a good time tonight". The men as they dance, pull out a five-shilling note and fling it with contemptuous abandon on the basket tray lying in front of the drummers. My own servant, an ʿĀmirī of Tarīm, paid his *riyāl* and danced, but counted it dear, for in his native Ḥaḍramawt the villagers, men and women, dance together in a simplicity and Arcadian innocence quite different from these gypsy folk. Here in Dathīnah, people told me, when you have danced once it but serves to whet your appetite for more, and so you keep on returning to dance again and again, no matter what it cost you.

The dances, simple as they look, have, I am assured, a complicated footwork, and in every gesture lies some allusion to the arts of courtship and love. In their patterns of gesture they are closely linked with the conventional themes and idioms of Arabic love poetry in the spoken tongue. It may well be inferred that this is true of certain genres of ancient Arabic verse, but if so, it has been long forgotten. At a *tafrigah* or fantasia, an evening's entertainment, many dances, each distinguished by its own name, are performed – the *qarʿah* danced to flute (*mizmār*) and drum (*ṭabl*), the *sharḥ*-dance [12] which has already been described, the *ʿaskarah* with a walking movement, which I take to mean "the soldier's dance", the *ṭannah* [13] where a man and woman facing one another, jump up and down. Each of these dances has its special traditional tune or tunes. I noted some verses of a Maʿnī song known as *miyāḥ* [14] sung to the *sharḥ*-dance [15],

Yā Aylamānī gadīdah *Min dākhili ʿṣ-ṣundūq ḥinnī*
Lā dawn qalb-ak taghannā *Minnak wa-lā ga 'l-ʿaib minnī* [15].

Sing out, o you Aylamānī rifle,
Drawn shining, brand-new, from within its case.
Your heart, did it perchance fall out of love,
'T were better than that I should lack in grace [16].

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[11] Gloss Dat., *raʾā* "regarder". Ibn al-Athīr, Nihāyah (Cairo 1311 H.), IV, p. 210, *awḍa'* means *aḥsan*. Cf. O. RESCHER, Vocabulaire du recueil de Bokhârî (Stuttgart 1922), *awḍa'* "plus jolie, plus propre".

[12] Described in "Daṯînah", p. 1013; Prose and Poetry, pp. 22-23.

[13] Gloss. Dat., *ṭann*, "sauter, jaillir".

[14] Daṯînah, p. 1513, *māḥ* "danser une ronde, une farandole lorsqu'on se meut à gauche et à droite avec dignité. *Bā limīḥ* "nous allons danser une ronde (*sharḥ*)". *Miyāḥ*, "farandole".

[15] Metre : || – | – ⏑ – – | – ⏑ – – || – – ⏑ – | – ⏑ – –

[16] Gloss Dat., *ḥann* "résonner, whistle of a bullet", *lā* "if", *dawn* "peut-être". *Ḥann*

The Aylamānī rifle, i. e. the German "Mauser", is a complimentary epithet for the Ma'nī girl whose parure glistens with the heavy weight of silver metal.

With the al-Muzaiyad at Mūdiyah there were two drummers and one flute ; the girls stand near the drummers, issuing forth to join in the dance, and returning there when tired, to rest a little before joining the dance anew. Though the liveliness of the dancing demands no small exertion on their part, they can continue at it most of the night.

Throughout the evening I noticed an old woman making her round of the back of the crowd collecting money or accosting the spectators to visit the tents. Even in day-time if you pass by the Ma'nī tents an old woman will accost you and invite you to enter them, but many men seem to sit there simply to pass the time of day, though in such cases, they will in accordance with the established custom of Southern Arabia, bring coffee with them as a small present. On my last brief visit to the Aden Protectorate a soldier driver from the Upper 'Awlaqī group recounted to us his experience with the Ma'n. Entering one of the Ma'nī tents, he sat down beside his N.C.O. who had visited the Ma'n before. A Ma'nī girl, he said, came and actually sat down between them, and from his acute embarrassment of actually sitting next to a woman in public he broke out into a sweat. Such embarrassment is very much a trait of the tribesman, and in like case the sophisticated Adenese would doubtless handle the situation very differently. The 'Awlaqī soldier found he had paid 5/– each to the husband, the mother, and the sister of the girl, to say nothing of 15/– to the girl herself, so he felt he should receive the appropriate return for his money. Her husband turned over to sleep, covering his eyes (*yulabbis 'uyūn-uh*).

As I was discussing the Ma'n some years before this with a friend in Mūdiyah, he too gave me an account of the conventions of approach to these girls which I found confirmed by an article in the Aden paper *al-Nahḍah* [17] attacking the Ma'n. According to the writer in the columns of this newspaper, when a man comes to the tent, the Ma'n say, "*Al-bait lak yā sīdī, wa-'l-khalā' lī dār*, The tent is yours, my lord, and the open country will be my house". If a man wishes to possess himself of a girl who has struck his fancy, he brings a sheep to the tent ; this the Ma'nī women cook for him, but give him only a small piece for himself, and they pass the evening in the tent singing. It was this singing that I used often to hear at night in the fort after the public dancing had ended, but it is in keeping with the times that I noticed a portable gramophone outside a Ma'nī tent. My Mūdiyah friend said that signs pass between the girl and the other occupants of the tent – including her husband, if she is married, and these persons depart on some pretext or another, perhaps for example to go to visit the *sūq*. If the girl is pretty, she is given two *riyāls* by the intent lover, and then, said my friend, he can have anything he wants, "*ḥatta 'l-ist*", if the suitor has a fancy to it !

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was explained to me as *aqraḥī* "fire", but it means here "sing". *Taghannā* seems to accord with the explanations in E. J. W. LANE's Lexicon.

[17] Al-Nahḍah (June, 15th, 1950), I, xxx.

The Ma'n sometimes collected about 100/- of an evening between the hours of 9 p. m. and midnight when at Mūdiyah in the summer of 1954, but other persons variously put the figure between 80/- and 150/-. These are large sums for a Protectorate village, even a market-town like Mūdiyah. A young man from Aden, fat and a little foolish, who had come up to Mūdiyah on holiday, it being the village whence his family was sprung, and become enamoured of Bedouin, that is to say of tribal life, not unlike a certain type of young British officer, buying himself a rifle and a dagger heavily studded with imitation sequins in gold, was deeply attracted by the undoubted charms of the Ma'nī girls. Despite the expressed disapproval of his relatives, affronted by his conduct, he spent, as gossip had it, no less than 100/- a night on the Ma'n, and gossip even related that he paid as much as 300/- and a gold ring over and above, for the favour of spending a night with the girl known as Lubnān [18]. In quite recent years in one of the villages of Dathīnah they caused great disturbance as young boys were stealing sheep from their father's *ḥawsh* to take to the Ma'nī girls, and the influence of the *'āqil* or headmen was too far decayed for them to be able to restrain them.

Quite small schoolboys of the Mūdiyah government school were singing of their (no doubt theoretical) passion for Lubnān, to the great scandal of the respectable people of the place. Lubnān herself was a tall girl, young, with a face revealing no emotion, slim, and a lovely dancer; she usually wore a frock of green silk velvet and, of course, the weighty silver ornaments – I watched her dancing many times. The village children would also sing, *"Ana amūt 'alā 'Ubbal*, I am dying [for love of] 'Ubbal". 'Ubbal was not the girl's real name of course, any more than Lubnān, for all the Ma'nī dancing girls have nice nicknames, and 'Ubbal was called after the German Opel car which is much sold in Aden. There were also, Umm al-Sā'ah, who may be the same as Bū Sā'ah mentioned earlier, Umm Ḥalā [19], and Abū Durg, but while I knew Lubnān and 'Ubbal by sight, I never identified the other girls.

In speaking of the Ma'n girls, the word *mu'arrasah* was used to describe them, though I did not sense that any deliberate insult was implied even as in the Egyptian, often semi-jocular *"yā mu'arris"*. Amongst the Ma'n, contrary to all other Arabs, the girl is preferred, or nobler than the man – *al-bint afḍal 'ind al-Ma'n*, because she brings them in money. Throughout the countryside the Ma'n, because they allow and even encourage their women to prostitution, are regarded as of very low degree. It is interesting that in negotiations the chief woman comes with a man to deal with Government, and hers is by far the stronger personality.

A child born of a Ma'nī woman is attributed to her husband [20], but if

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[18] I have no idea why she was called Lubnān, but the song, *Lubnān 'arūs al-kawn* "Lebanon is the bride of all creation", at once springs to my mind. Whether the Dathanīs would have heard this song on the radio and be punning on the name I do not know.

[19] *Ḥalā*, syn. *zain* "beautiful".

[20] Cf. the legal maxim, *al-walad li-'l-firāsh*. I am by no means convinced that this maxim derives from Roman law as I. GOLDZIHER and J. SCHACHT have persuasively argued, for we find this principle here in customary law in a very un-Islamic setting in

a child is born out of wedlock, as happened recently here, it is her own. Unfortunately I have not recorded whether a child with no known father is named as the son of his mother, though this is likely to be so, or whether indeed all Ma'nī children are described in this way. Lubnān in fact, is said not to conceive, but other girls make use of a drug called *kawfar* to prevent conception ; one says of the women that they *yitkawfarīn* "make use of *kawfar*". One of my informants who, though he would never openly avow it, evidently knew all there was to know about the Ma'nī girls from direct experience, stated that a Ma'nī girl he knew practised "coitus interruptus" to avoid conception. In Dathīnah generally, a woman pregnant from a lover, it was said, will partake of a mixture of shark, dates, and honey, in an attempt to expel the foetus at its earliest stages, but there are women here who can expel the foetus by pressure on the body, perhaps massage, so that the woman aborts [21]. These devices, whatever efficacy they may have, I am sure must be known to the Ma'n.

When I questioned my informant on the matter of disease amongst the Ma'n, he maintained there was none since the country is clean and far from Aden. This may be true, or it may have been true, though I heard later that a Protectorate medical officer held different opinions on the subject of the Ma'n. Venereal disease has been known in Arabia since 807 H. (1404-5 A. D.), and a Yemenite medical Ms. in my possession calls it the Frankish, Persian, or Armenian disease [22] ; there are historical references to its appearance in the Yemen in the histories, but in the past Dathīnah was probably sufficiently isolated to avoid any great incidence of it.

Nowadays the Ma'n are said to visit Dathīnah, Baiḥān, and Raṣāṣī country in the Yemen. When they decide to leave any place they collect all the money they have earned and divide it in shares amongst men and women ; it does not seem, however, that they have any fixed times for moving from

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a territory remote from the influence of Rome. SCHACHT's arguments (Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence [Oxford 1950], pp. 181-182) that this maxim was not acted upon as Islam developed, seems to postulate a society more Islamised and consistent than perhaps was actually the case.

[21] In the fragmentary treatises on Yemenite customary law made available to me for editing by the late ETTORE ROSSI, is the following interesting passage on tribal law relating to abortion :

Bāb idhā ṭa'alat al-imrāh bi-naṭsi-hā fi'l-an mimmā yusqiṭ al-walad min baṭni-hā bi-shurb duwā aw ghairi-hā aw ṭaḥs – lazima-hā li ahli-hi mā yalzam ghaira-hā fi 'l-ǰināyah, wa-lā budda min al-shahādah wa-illā lam yajib 'alai-hā qaṭ'ah, wa-'alā walīyi-hā, 'ala 'l-'ilm, 'ala 'l-niṣf min aymān al-rajul – ṭarq mā bain al-riǰāl wa-'l-nisā' ṭa-' 'lam dhālika.

The gist of this passage is that a woman who induces abortion in herself through drinking some consotion, or massage, is liable to the child's tribe for damages. Provision is made for witnesses to her deed.

[22] Cf. H. P. J. RENAUD and G. S. COLIN, Documents Marocains pour servir à l'histoire du "Mal Franc". Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocaines. Paris 1935, p. XXVII. Syphilis in Socotra today is still known as *faranj* according to N. I. CORKHILL, Health Adviser's Notes on a Visit to Socotra in February and March 1956, PHS /193/5, and in Oman, AL-SĀLIMĪ, Jawhar al-Niẓām (Cairo 1345 H.), p. 186.

one district to another. About the time of the fair at Shaikh 'Uthmān [23] the Ma'n sometimes come down to Aden and perform their dances outside Dār Sa'd (*yil'abū fī Dār Sa'd*) [24], since they are not really permitted to enter the colony. Dancing does go on at the Shaikh 'Uthmān fair inside the colony, but on the one occasion I have attended it the performers looked to me like women of the pariah Khādim caste.

The curious thing is that the Ma'n were prohibited from coming to Mūdiyah before the British penetration into the country during the war years, though they were allowed to pass through Mūdiyah and spend the night there. It is said to have been an Aden political assistant, 'Abdullāh Ḥasan, who issued the order permitting them to stay there, whereas the Mashāyikh in Mūdiyah used never to allow this. In the old tribal days, however, it does seem that they were under general protection and were allowed to wander about freely. If, for example, one of the Ma'n were to be killed here in Mūdiyah, the headman (*'āqil*) would send to the killer's place and say, "You have killed a *rabī'* [i. e. a protected person] of mine, and I want restitution". The blood-price would be higher even than that for a *qabīlī*. This last remark I interpret to mean that, with all the additional fines payable for the circumstances of killing another man's protected person the blood-money would amount to more than that of a tribesman, for of course, the Ma'nī being a *shāḥith* of low social position, and *nāqiṣ*, i. e. of inferior status, it seems hardly possible that the basic blood-money would be identical in both cases. Even today, arriving near Miqbābah, they send to the village and two Ṣāliḥīs meet them and the Ma'n give them goats and receive their protection because the place where they camp lies below their *ḥuṣns* or castles. Still, as MUBĀRAK said of the Ma'nī, *"Al-silāḥ ḥaqq-uh lisān-uh*, His weapon is his tongue". It is an *'aib* or shame to speak back at the Ma'nī when he is insulting. Out of fear of his tongue the tribesman will slaughter an animal for the entertainment of the Ma'nī [25]. Reminiscing on the olden days, and he meant before the British penetration into the Protectorate, MUBĀRAK said that few people came to visit you, and there was far more entertainment and generosity of this sort than nowadays when so many people arrive at your door. In the eastern part of the Western Protectorate animals were slaughtered on the roofs, and the blood ran down the sides of the walls (he must have meant down the gutters onto the wall) ; this was a sign of nobility and of generosity.

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[23] The name of this saint is al-Shaikh 'Uthmān b. Muḥammad al-Wuka'ī al-Zubairī al-Asadī, but I have not come across his biography in the usual sources. The *qafaṣ* over his tomb has a fine inscription with his name, and there is an old lamp in his mosque. The *manṣab* of Shaikh 'Uthmān in 1954 was 'Awaḍ Ḥamūd (Hal Hindī 'Umar), but the ancestor Hindī was an Arab by race, and the co-*manṣab*, his cousin, for there are always two *manṣabs* here, was Aḥmad b. Muḥammad 'Awaḍ 'Abd al-Raḥīm. The saint has *waqf* land in Lahej, Ḥuyūsh, etc., about which there is a dispute.

[24] It was to Dār Sa'd that during the short-lived ban on the import of *qāt* to Aden in 1957, that the *qāt*-eaters used to repair, and a shanty town sprang up where their needs were supplied. It had already fallen into ruin when I passed through it in 1958.

[25] Cf. infra, p. 748.

The Ma'n take their internal quarrels to the 'Awdhalī Sultan, Ṣāliḥ bin Ḥusain (now translated into Minister of Defence in the new Federation), for judgement, but the Sultan, with his strong reformist tendencies towards orthodox Islam, will not allow them to make money through the exercise of their profession. In former times I was told of the Ma'nī girls that *"mā kān yukassirhā illa 'l-Sulṭān*, Only a Sultan used to break her". "To break her" was paraphrased as *yiniḳ-hā*, and this custom is dealt with more fully in the passage translated below.

Again, I am told, if a noted headman (*'āqil*) dies, the Ma'nī will bring his drum to the grave, beat it, and stab it with his dagger. By this he implies, *"Ṭablī akbar 'aqīrah*, My drum is the greatest sacrifice I can offer". Or else he might say, *"Hādhā 'aqīratī 'alā hādha 'l-shaikh, mut'assiḥ 'alaih*, This is my sacrifice for this *shaikh*, whose [demise] I regret". *'Aqīrah* is generally a sacrificial animal, but the Ma'nī presumably gives his drum at least a symbolic value greater than an animal's. This may be compared with the breaking of the spear-shaft in honour of the deceased, described by MUBĀRAK below. Not dissimilar is that when a Ma'nī is afraid of a *qabīlī* he will bring his drum and stab it at the *qabīlī's* house, there being many analogies with this in tribal customary procedure in that one kills an animal as a demonstration that one is seeking the assistance of a stronger party, but I shall deal with this at length elsewhere.

I am much indebted to MUBĀRAK 'ABDULLĀH for sending me an account of the Ma'n, not always consistent with the information supplied me by other informants in every detail, though the divergencies are small. It is written in near-classical Arabic and it has seemed to me worth while giving the original where the Arabic is in itself significant.

"As for from what stock they are descended, I do not know, nor do I think anyone does know. They are families (*'ā'ilāt*) with different names, and you find some of these families vying in pride (*tatfākhar*) with others, each of them saying, 'We are the original minstrels (*al-shaḥadh al-aṣlīyīn*) !' [26] Their dialect and customs (*taqālīd*) are like those of Banyar [27], and wherever they go, they return to al-Raṣāṣ country [28] ; when a dispute comes about between them their recourse is to the Raṣāṣ Sultan [29]. As for their true name, they are al-Shaḥadh or al-Shuḥḥādh (minstrels), and as for the word Ma'n it is only used in Dathīnah and in al-Kawr of the 'Awdhalī country. One section (*firqah*) of them maintains their origin is from the minstrels of the Upper 'Awlaqī Sultanate.

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[26] *Aṣlī* means "pure, original, of good quality", etc.

[27] Banyar country is marked on HERMANN v. WISSMANN's map as lying along the border of the Yemen and the Aden Protectorate north of al-Baiḍā' and south of Jabal al-Nisīyīn.

[28] The capital of Raṣāṣī country is al-Baiḍā' close to the 'Awdhalī border.

[29] Earlier I have reported that they refer to the 'Awdhalī Sultan. The Arabic, *"marja'-hum ilā Sulṭān al-Raṣāṣ"* is a most significant phrase in Islam. The meaning is that they will refer their disputes for arbitration to the Sultan in accordance with customary law upon which he is an authority.

As for their basic occupation (*qānūn shughl-hum*), it is of two sorts, dancing (*al-raqṣ*) and the evening entertainment (*samrah*, i. e. with dancing and music). In the case of the dancing they issue forth after sunset to an open place with the girls, the men beating the drums and [playing] the pipes. When the village people hear the drum and pipe they hurry out to them, some to watch, some eager to dance ; one of the dancers of the village comes out into the circle of the dance (*yibruz ilā ḥalqat al-raqṣ*) and one of the dancing girls comes out and dances with him. When the dance has gone on a long time another girl comes out, then a third, then a fourth, and thus the dance goes on. During the course of the dance, the dancer puts down some money, not less than a dollar a time, while some become exhilarated (*yantashī*) [30] and put down two or three times [as much] [31]. When he leaves [the circle] another dancer enters, and so on.

Once the dancing is ended they collect the money they have gained (*ghanamū*), the person they trust takes it, and there they divide it out according to their customs, i. e. [on the basis] that the woman gets the same as the man [32]. Then they leave the dancing-place, each going to his tent, and those persons desirous of them (*muwalla'īn bi-him* [33]) follow them inside their tents, entering where the pretty girls are, saying, 'we would like to have a party (*labā samrah*)'. So they spread out mats, rugs for them there inside the tents, but first of all the *sāmir* or *summār* (i. e. the person or persons who wish the party) bring a head or a couple of head of sheep. They slaughter these, and the old women or those with ugly faces cook them (*yingaḥin-hā al-'agāwiz aw qabīḥāt al-manḍar*), while as for the pretty ones, each sits beside one of their visitors and they spend the night in singing, their men-folk being at the door of the tent, and sometimes they play the pipes and the drums (*yiqra'ūn al-mazāmīr wa-'l-ṭubūl*). Any one beside her guest you will see making love to him while he makes love to her, this, in the eyes of the minstrels, not touching their honour (*fī naḍar al-shaḥadh lā yamuss karāmat-hum*). Most times they dance and sing (*yismarūn*) till morning, then the visitor or visitors (*summār*) make a collection of some money which they give to them, and then leave the tent. You will find the girl or girls in whose tent the party took place, boasting next morning over those girls who had no night visitors, because such meat and money as they have gained is the lot of the people of the tent in which the party was held.

Now if it be a Sultan or Amir or important chief (*shaikh kabīr*), the prettiest girl spends the night by his side and the expenses of the party come

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[30] Gloss. Dat., to be in good humour, stolzieren.

[31] Here and elsewhere there are some interesting spellings in MUBĀRAK's letter. I do not think it merely an error in spelling that he should use *tanwīn* in *an* where a nominative is required by classical Arabic, an "error" which I have remarked many times in South Arabian Arabic. He has also some curious spellings with *tā' marbūṭah* for *tā'*, e. g., ثلاث مرّاة، البناة، يموت الميّة

[32] This is indeed surprising for Arabia. It will be recalled that actual blood-money for a woman is only half that payable for a man.

[33] *Muwalla'* is also a term used to describe a *qāt* addict.

from his private purse (*takālīf al-samrah takūn 'alā kīs-uh al-khāṣṣ*). Most times a party or parties are held at night (*tabāt samrah*) in all the tents, and the visitors vie as to which among them gives most animals to be slaughtered, and most money (*ʃa-yatzāyadūn al-summār man min-hum zaiyad fi 'l-dhabāyiḥ wa-a'ṭā al-nuqūd al-zāyidah*). This is the custom of the dance and the evening entertainment.

As for immoral acts (*al-af'āl al-danīnah*) [34], this is a difficult matter, except on rare occasions after one of the persons enamoured of them (*muwalla'*) spends his money and seduces them by presents (*yughrī-hin bi-'l-'aṭā*). Concerning the girls and the person who comes to them at their virginity (*man yaqa' bi-hin fī bukūrat-hin*) [35], it may be the lot (*naṣīb*) of the Sultans or the Amirs like al-Raṣāṣ. They say, when one of the girls becomes famous for outstanding beauty that he brings pressure to bear on her family until he takes her virginity (*yaḍghaṭ 'alā ahli-hā ḥattā yafukk bukūrat-hā*). This was in times past – the minstrels used to come to the country of the 'Awāliq, to Anṣāb, Markhah, and Khawrah up to the time of Sultan Ṣāliḥ [36]. Then they were prevented from coming to 'Awlaqī country because their safety became threatened, so since about forty years ago the land of the 'Awāliq has no longer known them, and the districts where they live are Dathīnaḥ, Bilād al-Raṣāṣ, Baiḥān, and Ḥarīb, they being prohibited from dancing in the land of the 'Awdhalī because the Sultan of the 'Awādhil believes that their actions corrupt morals.

There are minstrels throughout the whole of the Yemen, and in the Protectorates, but they differ from the wandering minstrels, for they do not display their women to people. Wherever the tribes come together in any place the minstrel comes forth (*yabruz*), a spear in hand, brandishing the spear in his right hand before the most prominent personage in that assembly, giving praise to him exceeding all bounds, and continuing to praise him until that personage gives him some money or piece of cloth [37]. The minstrel (*shāḥidh*) of each one of the Protectorate tribes is known and when a man dies (*yamūt al-maiyit*) the minstrel goes to near where the deceased is and proclaims the death of the departed (*yin'ā al-rāḥil*), praising him with praise most of which is extravagance. If he be a personage [of importance], he breaks the shaft (*ṣa'dah*) of his spear. Now the breaking of the [spear-]shaft is the greatest honour to the departed because it is [the subject] of a saying (*kilmah*) uttered when a man finds fault (*yadhumm*) with another man, saying, '*Fulān*

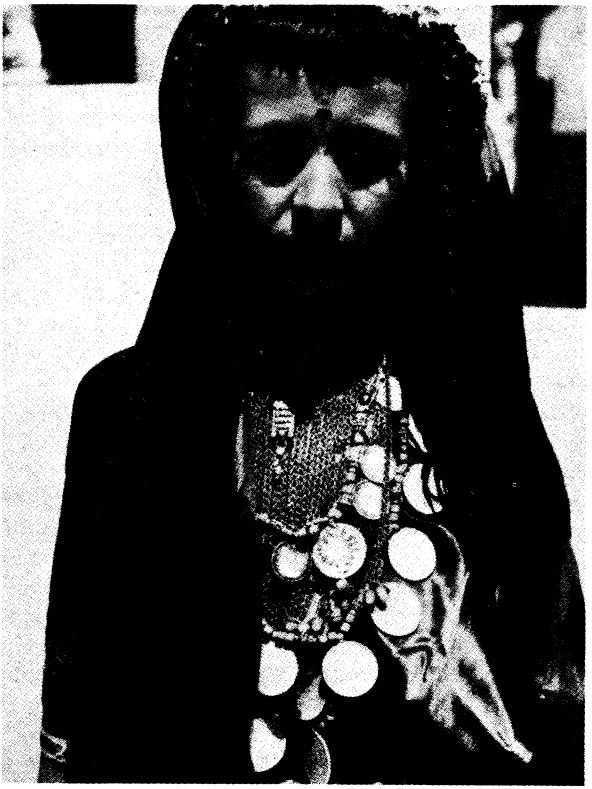
[34] The word *danīnah* is unknown to me, probably an error, but I am rendering it as equivalent to *danī'ah*, though this is subject to correction. From what I have reported from other sources I think MUBĀRAK with his tribal distaste for discussing anything he regards as improper or dishonourable, is making an understatement here. It seemed to me that the only difficulty confronting the would-be lover was the expensiveness of consorting with the Ma'nī girls, an ordinary soldier's pay certainly could not last long at the rate described by the driver.

[35] My rendering here is a little uncertain.

[36] Probably the Sultan Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abdullāh mentioned by C. DE LANDBERG.

[37] I have dealt with presents of cloth in my forthcoming study on the 'Awdhalī Sultanate.

mā yinkasir ʿalaih al-rumḥ, The spear will not be broken for so and so !' i. e. When he dies the minstrel won't break the spear over him. So the family of the departed are generous (*yukrimūn*) to the minstrel, presenting him with sheep and money so that he will be placated. Then, of latter years however the minstrels have considered this profession despised (*miḥnah ḥaqīrah*), so they have abandoned it and gone to honourable work, and only the name



Photograph by Flight-Lieutenant J. P. E. Williams

Gypsy dancing-girl, perhaps of the Maʿn, for her face is of a type common in Dathīnah. Her face is tattoed and may be smeared with yellow *hurud* (turmeric). Her necklace of Jewish workmanship will be set with red cornelians or red glass ; from it is suspended a charm of a known type, often set with a red stone. Some of the coins on the necklaces are Maria Theresa dollars, and she appears to be wearing a silver amulet case of pencil shape between the necklaces ; a silver waist-belt shows at the bottom of the photograph. The hair-style, if not that of Dathīnah, is almost identical with it, and she seems to be wearing silver ornaments on her hair. The costume of the Maʿn differs somewhat from that of the "nautch-girls" photographed by WYMAN BURY.

remains ; thus you find only an occasional one of them clinging to this profession. That, in my view, is because the minstrels were the servants of the ancient kings and used to gain a livelihood by praising kings, and entertaining [38] them with dancing and panegyrics, then they took this as a profession. I believe that the wandering minstrels will abandon this profession because some of them have now begun to buy land in Bilād al-Raṣāṣ and in Dathīnah, while a small number of them have abandoned this profession returning to buying and selling (i. e. trade). This is what I know of the minstrels in reply to your enquiry."

Where the Ma'n are concerned I fear MUBĀRAK is right, that they will abandon the entertainment profession for other pursuits, for they are open to attack on all sides. I have recorded that a local school teacher attacked a *qabīlī* on the subject of the Ma'n whose dances he attended, asking why people should waste money on them, pointing to the wealth they had acquired in the numbers of camels and sheep they own – to which I mentally added the weight of bullion worn by the women about their persons. He also attacked the use of the *mizmār*-pipes which he said *ḥarām*, forbidden, in Muslim law. The tribesman only replied to such a learned assault on the Ma'n that they were harmless, and this, poor things, was their only form of livelihood. The Ma'n do indeed provide a great diversion for the villages lacking which they would be much the duller, and as one may gather from the tribesman's reply, there is much quite pagan tolerance for old-established customs however non-Islamic they be. Furthermore there is, underlying the orthodoxy of the country, a different and more ancient code of sexual behaviour, revealed in certain remarks of IBN AL-MUJĀWIR, and which may lie behind the accusations of sexual license levelled at the Carmathians who, it is worth remembering, found support in the tribe of Yāfi'. The Qāḍī of course, though a mild man, was in official opposition to the Ma'n by the nature of his calling, and it may be only a matter of time till the Islamic injunction that women must not mingle with men is applied here as it has been in the 'Awdhalī Sultanate and so many other places. So perhaps we shall lose the picturesque performance of the Ma'n, and public morality will be satisfied by driving what is at present open, underground to flourish in less romantic surroundings.

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[38] Arabic, *y a r f hū 'alaihim*, my rendering being without confirmation.

ADDENDUM

P.743/9 Coitus interruptus, class. Ar. *'azl*. See al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones, London–Oxford, 1966, III, 919, for a question put to the Prophet on this subject, and Cyril Elgood, Tibb al-Nabi or Medicine of the Prophet, *Osiris*, Bruges, 1962, 144–45.